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ABSTRACT

In 1993-1996, the Grocers Research and Educational Foundation of the National Grocers Association developed entry-level skill standards for the food marketing industry. A coalition formed early in the project directed the skill standard development process and solicited input from major organizations involved in the industry. The validity of the process used to develop the standards was subjected to formative and summative evaluations. Data for both evaluations were collected through the following methods: meetings and interviews with current project staff, telephone interviews with previous project staff, review of all project files, a telephone survey of coalition members, and field interviews with representatives of two large supermarket chains. The formative evaluation focused on the following: formation and operation of the coalition; procurement of appropriate technical assistance; the occupational analysis and standards development processes; incorporation of high-performance workplace concepts in the standards; marketing initiatives; assessment issues; certification issues; piloting initiatives; sustainability strategies; and the New Jersey Department of Education's involvement in the project. The following items were examined during the summative evaluation: performance in meeting stated objectives and additional objectives implied in the project. It was recommended that development of a accreditation process for the industry be undertaken as the project's next activity. (MN)



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ED 414 461

# Summative and Formative Evaluations
# National Skill Standards Project
# Prepared for the National Grocers Association

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Submitted to
Mr. Thomas K. Zaucha, President and CEO
National Grocers Association

September 9, 1996

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# I. An Overview of the Project

On September 9, 1993, the United States Department of Education (DOE) awarded a three-year grant to the Grocers Research and Educational Foundation of the National Grocers Association (NGA) to develop entry level skill standards for the food marketing industry. The Grocers Research and Education Foundation was established by NGA in 1992 to be the food industry's center for education and technological research. NGA was the logical organization to develop entry level skill standards since this association represents the retail and wholesale grocers who compromise the independent sector of the industry.

The importance of this project is based upon the fact that more than 12 million individuals are employed in the food marketing industry in more than 1.5 million establishments. No formal entry level national skill standards have ever been developed prior to this project, and there was clear evidence of industry interest in this concept.

One of the requirements for the project was the preparation of a formative and summative evaluation process. The formative evaluation was to be conducted by the project management staff and the summative evaluation was to be prepared by an independent outside evaluator. Some formative evaluation information was included with periodic reports submitted to DOE. The following report will summarize the formative process as well as provide a summative evaluation of the project.

The project was supposed to be completed on August 31, 1996. A three-month extension was granted by DOE in August 1996 to complete several aspects of the project that could not be finalized by the August 31st date.

# II. Fact Finding Methodology

The process used for preparing the formative and summative evaluations included meetings and interviews with current project staff, telephone interviews with previous project staff, and a thorough review of all project files available in the NGA headquarters office. A telephone survey was conducted of coalition members and one trip was made to New Jersey to conduct interviews with Cynthia Bowman from Shop Rite Supermarkets, Inc. and Jean Pillet of the Wakefern Food Corporation.

# III. Formative Evaluation

## A. The Formation and Operation of the Coalition

A national coalition was formed early in the project to direct the skill standard development process and provide input from key constituent groups in this field. The coalition was successful in soliciting participation from major organizations involved in this industry. The following list includes some of

the participating organizations:

- Associated Wholesale Grocers
- Food Marketing Institute (FMI)
- Cornell University
- Michigan State University
- Western Michigan University
- St. Joseph's University
- National KAGRO
- NAWGA/IFDA
- The International Dairy/Deli Association
- The American Institute of Baking
- SUPERVALU Inc.
- Wakefern Food Corporation
- The New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Adult and Occupational Education
- The National Grocers Association (NGA)
- The Vocational-Technical Educational Consortium of States (V-TECS)
- The Produce Marketing Association
- The General Merchandise Distribution Council's Education Foundation
- The Mexican American Grocers Association

Coalition members and staff indicated a belief that the key industry groups were represented on the coalition and that the coalition make up was proper for the objectives of this project. The staff of the NGA were responsible for directing the work of the Coalition, and a plan of operation was developed indicating key activities initiated throughout the project and the party(s) responsible for each activity. The following questions deal with some of the key issues regarding the operation of the Coalition:

1. Did the Coalition achieve credibility as a developer of the standards?

Everyone I spoke with indicated that the coalition was a very credible group to develop the standards. Some individuals expressed a desire to have more industry input on the coalition, but this concern was not described as a factor that limited the credibility of the advisory body. Nobody identified a single key association in the industry that was not represented on the Coalition.

2. Did the Coalition achieve its objectives up to the date of this evaluation?

Coalition members and staff expressed satisfaction with completion of the draft standards for both the front end associate and stock clerk positions. This achievement was described as the major objective of the project by coalition members. Concerns were expressed by some coalition members that more time and effort should have been devoted to discussions of marketing and sustainability projects during earlier coalition meetings.

3. Are the Coalition members still committed to the project?

Most of the Coalition members are still committed to the project although some of them believe that their work is complete, and some new advisory group may be needed to carry the standards to the next steps in national acceptance. Attendance at coalition meetings varied and some coalition members expressed a feeling that "they were not aware of everything that is going on," but these comments did not reflect any concerns about the performance of the project. Most of the Coalition members contacted indicated an interest in seeing what happens now that the standards are completed. Another Coalition meeting is strongly advised to bring some closure to the project as well as to discuss future steps required in order to gain maximum benefit from the standards development work conducted by the group.

4. What aspects of the Coalition should be changed if the process were begun again?

Comments were made by coalition members that better attendance at meetings would have been desirable, but they were not sure how this could be achieved. Industry representatives described problems with national travel and conflicting priorities. One individual thought attendance might have improved if reimbursement was made available for coalition members. Coalition members seemed very pleased with the amount of consensus in the group and the consultation support that kept the project moving along in spite of the varying participation of coalition members at each meeting. It was of great interest to note that no staff or Coalition member expressed a strong belief that any major aspect of the coalition needed changing. Some comments were made that the Coalition seemed to be a somewhat "loose" or informal group, but most coalition members did not seem uncomfortable about this structure or form of operation. Some comments were made indicating that several coalition members would have preferred stronger leadership and direction from NGA staff, but this problem was not described as a shortcoming of the coalition.

**B. Obtaining Appropriate Technical Assistance**

All of the individuals contacted indicated they were very satisfied with the technical assistance utilized to complete the project. Coalition members frequently cited the valuable assistance provided by Cynthia Bowman when she was an employee of the New Jersey Department of Education. Her experience in developing educational standards was one of the most important success factors for the project. Important sources of technical assistance cited included Joan Wills and Barbara Kaufmann with the Center for Workforce Development at the Institute for Educational Leadership. Tony Alexander with ASAP helped develop the interactive CD-ROM training and assessment program.

Other sources of technical assistance included the various organizations represented on the coalition such as Cornell University, DECA, and the valuable assistance provided by Jean Pillet of the Wakefern Corporation. James Williams, the first NGA project Director, had a key role in initiating the project. His departure in May of 1995 increased the role of other consultants working on the project after that date. Initially it looked as though V-TECS and MARKED would play key consultation roles in the project. V-TECS did assist in reviewing proposed standards, and they submitted a bid for a certification examination. MARKED did not play the major role in the project

that was anticipated in the proposal since the certification option has not been fully evaluated as of the date of this report.

Some comments were made suggesting that NGA staff should have played a more effective role in managing and directing the project, but it was noted that staff turnover was a problem in this regard. Additionally, the departure of Cynthia Bowman from the New Jersey Department of Education in May 1996 left a gap in her assistance to the project, but her standards development work was essentially completed by this time period. All of the consultants definitely played a key role in the project and their contributions have had a measurable impact on the quality of the standards produced.

### C. The Occupational Analysis Process

Organizations involved in education and training in this field were contacted, and copies of any studies, reports, or curricula were sent to NGA headquarters for review by the project staff and consultants. Since no nationally recognized standards were identified for these entry level positions, the coalition played a major role in analyzing and evaluating a new group of tasks that were required for the national skill standards.

A modified DACUM process was used to evaluate the occupation and develop the skill standards. The Coalition selected two job titles to pursue. Cynthia Bowman developed a draft list of tasks for both job titles. The project then developed four regional technical committees to involve appropriate industry leaders in this process of further identifying key tasks and the accompanying step-by-step procedures for each position. Entry level position tasks were analyzed in single owner stores, regional chains, and national corporations. The technical committees utilized workers from 135 companies to develop a list of tasks for each occupational category. After a draft set of tasks was developed, surveys were sent out to 600 individuals in the field to validate and comment on the proposed task list. Changes were made in the standards incorporating the comments of these individuals. After this stage was completed, the proposed standards were reviewed by a panel of 12 individuals representing both industry and training program expertise. This panel was asked if the proposed standards made sense and if there was anything missing. Some changes were made in the draft standards as a result of this input, but the proposed changes were minimal.

All of the staff and Coalition members contacted expressed a high level of confidence in the technical process used to evaluate the occupation and propose new standards. The occupational analysis process appeared to involve all of the key players, and there were numerous opportunities on which to comment on and challenge any of the standards proposed. The assistance of the New Jersey Department of Education was cited frequently as one of the most important resources in this phase of the project.

### D. The Standards Development Process

After the occupational categories were analyzed, draft standards were prepared utilizing regional

technical committee input and surveys to additional individuals representing a cross section of the industry in each region. The final draft standards were then sent to the coalition for their review and then to the Board of Directors of the NGA. Almost everyone interviewed was pleased with the final standards and the process used to develop them. The following strengths and weaknesses were cited for the standards:

STRENGTHS:

- -The standards are developed in great detail (this has also been cited as a weakness by some individuals).
- -The standards emphasize step-by-step procedures.
- -The standards emphasize what is known to date about these entry level positions.
- -The standards identify related academic skills needed for the positions.
- -Performance checklists are included which will assist both industry and educational users.
- -A fair and systematic process was used to develop the standards.

WEAKNESSES:

- -The size of the documents and the level of detail may be overwhelming to some users, especially in the individual stores or smaller chains.

  (Note: The level of detail has also been cited as a strength for some of the larger organizations and educational bodies using the standards)
- -The packaging of the standards may be more appealing to educational organizations than industry users.
- -The background information included for potential users is limited.

The standards definitely reflect a design bias toward educational organizations rather than industry users, but the performance checklists will permit use of parts of the standards in a variety of workplace and educational settings. While there appears to be a consensus that the final standards are a valuable and well-designed product, the ultimate test of the success of this effort will be the acceptance of the standards by the industry and their incorporation in future training programs. It is too early to measure this impact since the final standards will not be available for another month.

The draft standards have been accepted by the leadership of the National Grocers Association, but no other national organizations have taken an official stand on the standards as of the date of this report. There is no reason to assume that the other organizations represented on the coalition will not endorse the final standards.

### E. Incorporation of High Performance Workplace Concepts in the Standards

Coalition and staff members interviewed indicated that high performance workplace concepts were incorporated in the standards based upon the organizations represented in the Coalition. Industry

representatives invited to serve on the technical committees developing and evaluating the standards also reflected the practices of high performance workplaces according to individuals interviewed. While there did not appear to be an identified formal strategy to incorporate these types of organizations in the project, almost everyone contacted felt comfortable that "high performance" institutions and training organizations were involved in the development of these standards.

### F. Marketing Initiatives

The DOE grant application referred to a dissemination plan for the standards utilizing the organizations and agencies involved in the Coalition. The NGA staff was supposed to use professional journals, press releases, and other information networks to publicize the project and its results. The proposal also stated that the New Jersey Department of Education would assist in the dissemination of standards information. Since the final standards have not yet been printed, it is too early to determine how successful the dissemination process will be, but the following marketing initiatives have been undertaken by the project staff and consultants:

- Press releases were prepared announcing the awarding of the DOE grant.
- An article on the project was included in the 1996 NGA convention issue of National Grocer.
- A well-attended workshop on the skill standards project was conducted by Cynthia Bowman at the last NGA annual meeting.
- An article on the project was included in the April/May, 1996 issue of NGA Express Lanes.
- A CD-ROM interactive training program utilizing the skill standards is under development.
- A meeting was held with Washington, D.C. area grocery retailers to discuss the project and the skill standards earlier this year.
- A video program was prepared describing the project and its goals.

Several Coalition members talked about the need to give more attention to marketing issues since the standards are almost completed. There was a perception that marketing should have been given more attention earlier in the project rather than at the "tail end." A marketing plan needs to be developed as soon as possible after decisions are made regarding the appropriate strategy for launching the standards in the industry and educational world. The following additional marketing strategies were suggested by consultants and Coalition members:

1. Regional educational workshops should be conducted providing information and assistance on the proper use of the standards. It was suggested that members of the technical panels and the consultants that wrote the standards could assist in this activity.

2. A well-designed brochure needs to be developed describing the standards and how they can be used. This brochure should be distributed to human resource and training staff in the grocery industry as well as to educators.

3. The standards can be re-packaged in sets covering specific tasks. This process might make the standards more useful and "user friendly" for the industry.

4. NGA and FMI should formally announce their board endorsement of the standards. Other organizations participating in the project should be invited to join these two groups with similar endorsement and publicity efforts.

5. Educational programs and presentations should be conducted at trade association meetings or meetings of wholesalers.

6. The CD-ROM interactive training and assessment program needs to be completed and made available to the industry in an attractive package. It should be priced to facilitate widespread use.

7. A marketing committee or subgroup of the Coalition should be convened to facilitate the development of a coordinated marketing effort.

NGA staff did express concerns regarding the initiation of marketing efforts until the project was completed and the benefits and uses of the final products were clear, but it probably would have been better to begin marketing discussions prior to the end stage of the project. Clearly, marketing decisions that must be made in the near future will have a major impact on the acceptance and use of the skill standards.

### G. Assessment Issues

Assessment procedures are important to measure what impact the standards have in education, training, and employment. Coalition and staff members have discussed this issue, but no clear national assessment strategy has been decided at this point. Everyone involved with the project understands the importance of an assessment process, but there is no consensus regarding the appropriate process, nor is it clear which entity should have the responsibility for this activity. There is a fair amount of interest in certification, but little evidence that there is a market to sustain a national certification effort for entry level workers in this field. Bids for a national certification examination have been received from several testing organizations, but no basic market research has been conducted documenting a demand for a certification program.

Individual schools and training entities can develop their own assessment instruments, but these systems will not ensure a uniform national assessment system The performance checklists included at the end of each set of standards will probably be used by employers to assess performance of employees in each of the task areas, but this use will not result in any source of data that will document the benefits of the standards to employers or employees in this field. The interactive CD-ROM program will provide employers with a basic training and assessment instrument. However, this program will not address the broader assessment question for new national skill standards. NGA staff and the coalition clearly need to make some decision regarding the appropriate assessment system or procedures recommended for these new standards.

## H. Certification Issues

The DOE proposal and the plan of operation for this project have discussed the development of a certification program utilizing the skill standards. Considerable interest in the concept of certification has been expressed, but no clear direction or plan has emerged to develop a program at this point. An RFP was sent to a list of testing organizations and bids have been submitted to NGA for the development of certification examinations. No decision has been reached regarding the award of a certification testing contract. Since I am a consultant in credentialing issues, I have given this issue a considerable amount of attention in my research and interviews. I do not believe that sufficient market research has been completed to warrant a contract for testing services at this time.

While there is interest in certification, it seems that the term means different things to some of the Coalition members. Also, there is little consensus that a certification will work for entry level positions experiencing the high rate of turnover encountered in the food marketing industry. Employees could not be expected to pay for or pursue national credentials at this level, and employers are cautious, to say the least, about investing their resources in a national certification program for front end associates or stock clerks.

Even though national certification is a good way for some of the skill standards projects to become self-sustaining, I believe the marketing research always needs to be conducted before any final decisions are made regarding developing a program. Some might argue that NGA has not achieved this objective in their work plan. The evaluator would suggest that caution is in their best interest in considering the various options for this new venture. Certification may be a service that can be offered at some point in the future, but this project does not have the marketing data to justify movement in this direction at this point in time.

## I. Piloting Initiatives

The Coalition has discussed piloting efforts, but more thought needs to be given to this important phase of the project. While no specific piloting plan was developed, a considerable amount of interest in piloting projects emerged while conducting this study. The following organizations have expressed interest in some type of piloting work utilizing the standards:

1. The Wakefern Food Corporation will be using the performance steps (Section 7 of the standards) for bagging for the front end associate position. Wakefern will introduce this training through their nine companies representing 80 stores. Jean Pillet, a member of the Coalition, will develop this training program and evaluate its use in this corporation. Mr. Pillet expects to utilize other portions of the standards in future training efforts in the Wakefern Corporation. He discussed plans to develop a multimedia training program for cashiers.

2. Cynthia Bowman reported that the State of New Jersey will implement use of the skill standards in their supermarket career training programs. She also reported that California, Iowa, Delaware, and Washington States have indicated interest in using the new standards in their training

programs.

3. Cynthia Bowman reported that the standards will be used in upcoming Shop Rite training programs. The following supermarket companies have contacted her regarding future use of the skill standards as well:

-HyVee
-Piggly Wiggly
-Pathmark
-A & P
-Kings
-Spartan Stores
-Bargain Foods

She estimated that she has been contacted by approximately 30 companies since she gave a presentation on the skill standards at an NGA annual meeting.

4. NGA files included more than 250 requests from schools and V-tech training programs for information on the standards.

5. Dwayne Richards, Executive Director of the Arizona Food and Marketing Alliance (AFMA) indicated an interest in using Arizona as a state to pilot test the standards. Mr. Richards has experience working with skill standards developed by the retail federation and reported that there is a very active and interested education community in Arizona.

Since most of these efforts are just beginning or are planned for the future, NGA needs to develop an evaluation system to identify and evaluate the implementation experience in each of these settings.

**J. Sustainability Strategies**

The Coalition did discuss sustainability strategies in February, but no concrete plans or strategies were developed. Coalition members expressed a need to address these questions as soon as possible since the standards are close to being completed in a form available to the public. The interest in piloting efforts is a good sign of opportunities for increased use of the standards. Almost everyone I spoke with expressed some interest in developing a "packaged marketing piece" to explain the various uses of the standards for different target audiences such as schools and employers. NGA and the other associations involved in this project need to decide what role they will play as a group or individuals in the future use of the standards.

**K. Involvement of the State of New Jersey Department of Education in the Project**

Cynthia Bowman served as the lead consultant in the project while she was an employee of the New Jersey Department of Education. This assistance was clearly an important asset to the project and

her involvement in the project was greatly appreciated by the Coalition members. Involvement of the State of New Jersey will also increase the publicity for using the standards among other state education departments. The involvement of a state education department did include additional contracting issues and coordination tasks, but the benefits seemed to outweigh the additional costs to involve this state government organization. There is some evidence of confusion regarding the role of the consultant versus a project manager. This situation was in some respects caused by the changes in NGA staff throughout the project. Written policies clarifying the roles of each of the parties involved in the project might have helped eliminate some of this problem. Cynthia Bowman's career change which took her out of the project this spring is another example of the challenges faced by this entire project due to personnel changes.

### L. Conclusions

While the overall project seemed to suffer from problems related to NGA staff turnover, the final standards developed have been well received by the organizations that have reviewed them, to date. The development process took longer than was expected in some instances, nevertheless, the standards development process was completed fairly close to schedule in spite of staff turnover at NGA. Also, there was little evidence of conflict or disagreement among Coalition members during the standards development process. The major challenges for the implementation of the standards are yet to come. Questions regarding certification or other assessment mechanisms have yet to be dealt with, but NGA and other Coalition members seem quite committed to carrying these standards to the next level of acceptance and use in the industry.

## IV. Summative Evaluation

### A. Performance in Meeting Stated Objectives

The following three objectives were identified in the Executive Summary of the DOE grant application:

**1. The project would work with the principal stakeholders in the food marketing industry to identify and verify the major competencies, standards and certification requirements for the development of a "world class" work force.**

Accomplishments

The principal stakeholders were definitely involved in the Coalition, and final standards for the front end associate and stock production associate positions were completed in August 1996. The standards are very thorough and comprehensive. Standards documents include:

-Duty/Task lists;
-Conditions of performance of tasks;
-Performance steps;

-Enabling competencies;
-Related academic skills and SCANS competencies;
-Safety and health information;
-Performance checklists.

Certification requirements have been discussed at some meetings of the Coalition, but no final decisions have been made regarding certification or other assessment systems.

**2. The project proposed to work with V-TECS and MARKED in order to develop procedures which meet the standards and measures provisions of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act regarding the measurement of student progress toward competency attainment and gains at the local program level.**

Accomplishments

The project worked with V-TECS volunteer leadership in the development of the standards. V-TECS staff confirmed that the final standards document met the standards and measures provisions of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act. MARKED was originally considered a major resource for certification assistance; however, their approach to standards development was not embraced by the Coalition.

**3. The project proposed to use industry expertise in developing interactive training materials that will use the project's industry standards.**

Accomplishments

Industry expertise has been utilized with the assistance of an interactive training consultant to develop a demonstration model CD-ROM interactive training and assessment program. The demonstration program needs to be modified to include psychometrically valid questions in the assessment component. The program also needs technical refinements to make the program more "user friendly" for the wide variety of training uses in the food marketing industry. The first model has been developed for the front end associate, and NGA is working with the training consultant to develop a companion stock production clerk program.

This component of the project has the potential to become the most useful and popular component of the project for industry use. Since the training program will include multimedia presentations and actual video scenarios, it is anticipated that this package can be utilized very rapidly in the industry. The training and assessment program should increase interest in other uses of the standards. Some Coalition members described the CD-ROM training program as an important companion piece to the standards documents.

Decisions still need to be made regarding pricing and packaging of the CD-ROM program and the

relationship of this component to the overall standards marketing effort.

### B. Performance in Meeting Additional Objectives Implied in the Project

The following additional objectives were either stated or implied in various portions of the proposal, the plan of operation and other promotional materials developed to date:

**1. The new standards were supposed to reduce employee turnover and unemployment in the food marketing industry.**

Accomplishments

Annual employee turnover in this industry is more than 70% nationwide. Most of the Coalition members and consultants that I interviewed believed that the standards have the potential to reduce this figure and contribute toward a more stable workforce; however, it is too early to measure the impact of the standards in meeting this goal.

**2. The new standards were supposed to help the industry comply with the Americans with Disability Act and provide benefits for minorities, the disabled, the disadvantaged, senior citizens, new job entrants and re-entrants.**

Accomplishments

Again, it is too early to measure the impact of the standards in these areas. While most of the Coalition members interviewed indicated optimism about having positive impacts in each of these areas, the actual outcome remains to be seen. This is an important aspect of the project to evaluate in future years.

**3. Other benefits that were cited for this industry included greater flexibility in the use of workers, expanded occupational and educational options for workers, increased employment security and marketability, and greater job satisfaction.**

Accomplishments

It is too early to measure the impact of the standards in any of these areas, but the project leadership should be thinking about an ongoing evaluation system that will systematically collect information regarding the benefits accrued from the use of the new standards in various training and work sites. Also, the success of future marketing and promotion efforts related to the use of the standards will have a great impact on achieving any of these goals.

**4. The project proposed to develop procedures for using the skill standards as the basis for the development of curricula.**

Accomplishments

The project has made good progress in this area in the sense that the final documents are very suitable for immediate use in developing curricula for organized training and educational programs in this field. The standards can be more readily utilized in educational organizations and in some of the larger food chains. Challenges in using the standards still exist in the smaller chains and individual stores. The interactive CD-ROM program should be well received in these settings, but more thought needs to be given to developing a program or plan for introducing the use of the standards in various training sites and settings.

**5. The plan of operation discussed the development of certification tests and procedures. The plan also proposed developing a method to determine whether certified personnel are better performers than non-certified personnel.**

Accomplishments

All of the Coalition members and staff agreed that some type of assessment system is important for measuring the impact of the new standards; however, there is no consensus in the group regarding the best approach to this challenging question. Preliminary discussions with industry representatives did not reveal a strong enough market for a national certification for entry level employees at this point in time. While most of the individuals interviewed expressed interest in the concept, there was no agreement as to who would pay for certification or who would require it, especially in a field with such a high turnover rate. Some Coalition members thought of certification as a concept unique to each corporation rather than a national program.

Bids for certification examinations have been solicited, and some decision needs to be made regarding this concept very soon. Other assessment options that could be utilized include the development of uniform national examinations for educational organizations and industry training sites. Several industry representatives that I spoke with indicated an interest in having the educational organizations assume responsibility for developing and utilizing a national assessment system. This concept was even more popular in the smaller chains or individual stores. The larger chains that spend more time on training and assessment will still utilize their own training and assessment procedures, but they will probably incorporate varying applications of the new national skill standards.

One observation that is clear about this issue is the need to assist a variety of educational and industry users with assessment procedures that are flexible and can be tailored to the unique needs of different settings. Deciding on an assessment strategy(s) is one of the most important decisions that the Coalition still needs to make.

**6. The plan of operation procedures discussed proposing procedures for identifying and accommodating probable future skill standards.**

Accomplishments

Important decisions remain to be made regarding the marketing strategy and proposed packaging of the new skill standards. These decisions will in turn have an impact on the future of the standards and the potential role of a volunteer advisory body assisting with the promotion, maintenance and updating of the current standards. All of the Coalition members contacted indicated an interest in developing a system or program to sustain the future use of the skill standards. While some interest was expressed in looking at additional areas for skill standards, little thought has been given to this concept, since final decisions have yet to be made regarding sustaining the current effort. Again, this is an important issue that needs to be addressed by the Coalition and NGA.

**7. The proposal included a statement that project results would be disseminated to industry, labor, and education.**

Accomplishments

The project did develop several marketing initiatives to announce the goals of the project. Requests for information regarding the new final standards are already coming in from education and industry sources. The New Jersey Department of Education will informally assist in disseminating the results of this project with their counterparts in other states, but the bulk of the publicity for the final standards should come from NGA and the other associations represented in the Coalition. No formal dissemination or marketing plan has been developed at this time. Some decisions will need to be made very soon regarding the packaging, promotion, and use of the standards.

**8. The proposal discussed evaluating activities and products produced by the project.**

Accomplishments

No formative evaluation process was developed or utilized; however, the periodic status reports submitted to DOE provided a summary of the formative aspects of the process. This summative evaluation identified several areas that still need additional planning and implementation work. It is important to build a more structured evaluation process into the future marketing efforts to help quantify the benefits that may accrue to the various stakeholders resulting from the use of these standards.

## V. Next Steps for The Project

Several Coalition members mentioned the need for a "strategy" regarding the next steps for the project. This is one of the most important steps left to bring closure to the project. The strategy for the next phases in the implementation of the skill standards should deal with the following key issues:

- What is the mission for the implementation phase of the skill standards project?
- What are the objectives of the project at this next stage to ensure the appropriate utilization of the standards?

-What is the recommended assessment mechanism/system?
-Is certification feasible/desirable at this time?
-Is an accreditation program feasible/desirable at this time?
-How should the standards be promoted and packaged for educational organizations and industry?

- What governance structure is best suited to achieve this mission and objectives?
- What level of resources and staff support is required to implement the approved strategy?

**Implementation Options**

Several implementation options have been identified by the preparer of this report which the project can choose from depending upon the decisions of the NGA and Coalition members:

**A. Distribution of final Standards and Interactive CD-ROM program with minimal publicity**

Utilization of this option would involve preparing cover letters and press releases announcing the availability and process for ordering the final products of the project. This strategy involves the least cost to the sponsoring organizations, but it also produces the lowest impact or benefit for the industry. Each user of the standards basically decides what they want to do with the standards and how they will be incorporated in their own training and assessment systems.

**B. Implementation of Option A with the addition of additional products/services and formal marketing efforts**

Utilization of this strategy would involve the development of a formal marketing plan with the creation of accompanying products and services such as the following:

1. Development of accompanying instruction booklets or more detailed literature discussing possible uses of the standards;
2. Possible re-packaging of the standards to a shorter format covering specific tasks with accompanying checklists;
3. Possible development of an implementation video program(s) for the various user groups;
4. Conducting a series of regional user workshops providing information to potential users on the proper use of the standards in various work/training settings.

Each of these efforts would add value to the standards and increase the potential for broader use and acceptance. These efforts will require additional staff time and financial resources, but these value added features also increase the value of the standards and their potential to produce additional revenue for the sponsoring organization(s).

**C. Implementation of Options A or B with the addition of a formal national certification program**

Utilization of this option assumes that some standards materials will be developed for various end users and that a national certification program will be initiated utilizing the skills standards. This option would require the greatest amount of financial and staff resources, but it also has the potential to produce revenue to offset some or all of these expenses depending upon the acceptance of the credential in the industry. If a decision is made to pursue this option, a thorough market feasibility study needs to be conducted before any decision is made regarding contracts for testing services. If sufficient demand is identified from marketing research, a decision can be made to develop a certification program assuming the sponsoring organization(s) want to proceed with this option. Certification is a major undertaking for any organization. The following pros and cons should be considered when evaluating this option:

PROS:

-Certification can provide a clear and simple national measure of competence in a discipline.
-Certification has the potential to raise a sense of "professionalism" in a discipline.
-A strong certification program has the potential to give national standards a good foundation for future use and increased national acceptance.
-Some employers would like to have this measure for evaluating job candidates.
-Employers can still supplement the training and assessment of certified employees with their own company specific training.
-Credible certification programs give the industry leadership a stronger role in the future evolution of the workplace.

CONS:

-Certification is a long-term project and not suitable for implementation on an experimental basis.
-The potential demand for certification in this industry seems to vary depending upon the size of the store(s), the geographic location, and the cost of the process.
-Certification is expensive to develop and usually requires more staff support than is usually anticipated in the beginning of the process.
-The track record of certification programs for entry level employees with a high turnover rate is uncertain.
-Certification programs have to meet minimum legal standards to assure competence and protect the sponsoring organization(s).
-There is some confusion in the field regarding credentialing terminology and the meaning of certification.

In addition, certification programs usually require a lot of education and discussion in industries where model programs do not exist. If a certification program is developed, the ideal supporting organization would be a coalition of the leading associations in the food service industry. Another option in certification is the evaluation of a functional area such as "customer service" which could serve multiple industries such as the retail and hospitality fields. NGA should also work with the

National Retail Federation and the National Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education (CHRIE) to explore certification opportunities in the "cross walking"exercises and cross industry core service certificate initiatives being undertaken by these organizations. These certification efforts may be another way to "test the waters" with a broader credential meeting the needs of multiple service industries.

**D. Implementation of options A and B with the addition of an accreditation program**

Accreditation is a concept involving the development of standards and measuring compliance with them in an organization or institution. Accreditation is a concept that could be developed to promote and recognize acceptable training programs (both in educational organizations and industry) utilizing the new national skill standards. Accreditation programs can be developed in addition to certification programs, but I would not encourage implementing both an accreditation program and a certification program at the same time. The resource demands for each of these projects is significant and trying to develop both simultaneously could be an operational problem for any organization. Accreditation is a concept which could support widespread use of the skill standards in a uniform format that could help contribute to the national goal of expanding the trained workforce in this field and giving the association leadership a considerable voice in the use of the standards. Accreditation is a major undertaking for any organization like a certification program. The following PROS and CONS should be considered when considering this option:

PROS:

-Accreditation would give the association leadership a powerful future role in deciding the shape of education for food service workers.
-Good accreditation programs help develop sound educational efforts as well as evaluate their performance.
-A good accreditation program could help the industry and students identify acceptable and "high quality" training programs.
-Accreditation programs can be as simple or complex as the sponsoring organization wishes.
-Good educational organizations usually welcome a review process that will recognize their performance.
-An accreditation process can require utilization of a minimally acceptable assessment system in the educational organization or industry training sites.

CONS:

-Accreditation is usually a rather demanding project, and some accreditation efforts do not produce enough revenue to pay for their expenses.
-Accreditation is a standard setting process that does increase the legal exposure of the sponsoring organization(s).
-Accreditation involves a lot of consensus building among the educational stakeholders.
-Developing a good accreditation programs takes a lot of staff time, planning, and volunteer

committee work.

-Accreditation programs sometimes place association members in conflict with the accreditation arm of the association. This is one of the arguments for administratively independent accreditation efforts. As in certification, a multi-association-sponsored accreditation process usually enjoys more clout and success in the long run.

One of the options that could be developed in line with an accreditation program is the offering of a nationally accepted performance examination demonstrating minimal competence in completion of training programs. This could involve several different versions of the examination for educational and industry organizations. Offering a nationally recognized examination and utilizing acceptable grading/scoring procedures could be an accreditation requirement. Also, a nationally recognized examination could be offered to organizations interested in seeking accreditation. One individual suggested that some national organization should score any examination in this field to guard against any tampering with passing scores, but this process would involve considerable additional expense and staff demands for the sponsoring organization(s).

The Automotive Technicians Education Foundation, Inc. (NATEF) developed a good accreditation process for automotive training programs that could be a model for the food service industry.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

After reviewing the options available to the project at this time, I would recommend that options B and D (accreditation) be initiated at this time. Accreditation has the potential to provide benefits to the largest number of individuals and employers with the lowest cost to the sponsoring organization(s). Certification is still a possibility in the future, but I wouldn't recommend that any additional funds be spent on certification services until a thorough feasibility study is completed and the market for this service has been analyzed. In fact, a feasibility study for an accreditation program is also important to measure the receptiveness of educational organizations and the industry to this concept.

Pursuit of any of these initiatives will require the commitment of financial resources and additional staff time for the sponsoring organization(s). Since the standards development phase of the project suffered from staff turnover, it is important to do as much as possible to ensure staffing continuity in this next phase of the project. Decisions also need to be made regarding the future of the Coalition. Some advisory group is important for most of the potential future implementation efforts. The Coalition could fill this role or some new group may be needed to address the different implementation challenges. Several people suggested that, at a minimum, NGA and FMI need to play a joint leadership role in the future use of the standards.

The project does have many important decisions to make in the near future. While it does appear that some of the most critical decisions regarding the project have been left to the very end of the grant period, I believe the standards developed are a valuable product which will ultimately have an important impact on the food service industry.